DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 393 169 EA 027 420

AUTHOR Fasko, Daniel, Jr.; And Others
TITLE An Analysis of Disciplinary Suspensions.
PUB DATE Nov 95
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Biloxi, MS, November 8-10, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Probation; Attendance; *Disabilities; *Discipline; *Discipline Policy; Discipline Problems; Elementary Secondary Education; Special Needs Students; *Suspension
IDENTIFIERS *Kentucky

ABSTRACT

Student punishment has received increased scrutiny; one of the concerns is that not all students are punished equally. This paper presents findings of a study that investigated whether race, gender, or existence of student disability affected punishment practices in an eastern Kentucky school district. Since corporal punishment had been banned in the district, there was interest in the incidence and resolution of behavioral problems. Analysis of the records of 465 students who were suspended during the 1994-95 school year indicated that no suspensions were tabulated for minority students (one percent of student population). Male adolescents developed more conduct problems than did females and younger students. Almost 20 percent of the suspensions were given to students categorized as disabled; disabled students composed 14 percent of the student body. Although the overall number of male suspensions increased by school level, the proportion of suspended males with disabilities tended to decrease as students moved from elementary school to the secondary level. It is recommended that the district explore conflict-resolution strategies that teach appropriate behavior. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 393 169

An Analysis of Disciplinary Suspensions

Daniel Fasko, Jr. Deborah J. Grubb

and

Jeanne S. Osborne

Morehead State University
Morehead, KY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Fasko, Jr.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Biloxi, MS, November, 1995.

EA027420

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

In response to a question regarding the incidence and resolution of behavioral problems in an eastern Kentucky school district since the banning of corporal punishment, a survey and analysis of student suspensions was undertaken based on district student records. Demographic overview of the school district indicates that the population (3,077) was predominately white (99%), fairly evenly split between males and females (51% to 49%), and included 500 (14%) disabled students. Results of a descriptive analysis of 465 students suspended during the 1994-95 school year indicate that no suspensions were tabulated for minority students; 385 white males were suspended as were 80 white females. Twenty percent of suspensions overall (92) were tabulated for disabled students. Although the number of male suspensions increased by school level, the proportion of suspended males with disabilities tended to decrease by level from 67% (two of three) at the elementary level, to 21% (15 of 70) at the middle school and 24% (25 of 102) at the high school level. The implications of these finding are relevant to both practice and research and suggest the need for developing alternate discipline strategies for disabled students, as well as determining the generalizability of these results.

An Analysis Of Disciplinary Suspensions

A topic of significant concern to parents, teachers, and school administrators is misbehavior at school and resulting punishments. There has been an increase in discipline problems at schools in recent years which has escalated to a level where "students can not learn and teachers can not teach" (Adams, 1992, p.1).

School personnel attempt to control student behavior through a variety of behavior management methods, but often resort to punitive methods of discipline such as corporal punishment, suspension and expulsion. Many school districts have been advised for years that corporal punishment is not an effective deterent to negative behaviors (Hart, 1987). However, the increase in litigation involving corporal punishment has caused some school districts to take the advice of professionals in the field and their insurance companies to abolish the use of corporal punishment.

In the absence of corporal punishment, suspension is often used by school personnel. Suspension, as a form of punishment, has serious educational implications because suspension removes the student from school. This can cause the student to be estranged from the school which might increase the likelihood of dropping out of school and it can cause a burden on the community if youth are not in school and go unsupervised, possibly committing acts of vandalism. More importantly, suspensions remove the student from the learning environment of the school. School is not only the place where students learn the academic skills they need in order to be a productive member of society, it is also the place where students learn appropriate behavior, cooperation, and conformity to institutional norms (Adams, 1992).

Punishment of students is receiving increased scrutiny because several studies are now indicating that all students are not punished equally. Males are much more likely than females to be punished and minorities are more likely than whites to receive punishment for the same offenses (McFadden, Marsah II, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Sanson, Prior, Smart, & Oberklaid, 1993; Zoccolillo, 1993).

Unfortunately, studies of punishment of disabled versus non-disabled students are notably lacking. For example, Rose (1988) found that school personnel are more tolerant of disruptive behavior and violations of school rules but less tolerant of violent behavior among the handicapped. Rose also reported that among the handicapped population, learning disabled students were most likely to be suspended, behavior disordered students were most likely to be expelled, and mentally retarded students were least likely to be suspended or expelled. In addition, McFadden et al. (1992) found that handicapped students were punished at a level which exceeded their proportion in the student population. They found no significant differences in seriousness of punished misbehaviors between handicapped and nonhandicapped students. However, they did find that handicapped students demonstrated less truant and less defiant behaviors, but demonstrated more unacceptable physical contact. There were no significant differences between handicapped and nonhandicapped in fighting.

Problem

An issue of concern in our region is what kind of conduct problems are occurring in a local school district and what is the district doing when these problems occur. Since the local school district has banned corporal punishment, the major disciplinary action for conduct problems, such as fighting, cheating, stealing, vandalism, etc. is suspension from

school. Also, since the research indicates that more males get punished than do females, and more minorities get punished than do whites, we felt it was important to determine if the local school district had similar results. Another point of interest was whether there were differences in suspensions for conduct problems between the elementary, middle, and secondary schools, and whether students enrolled in special education are suspended at a disproportionate rate.

Procedures

Data were collected from the district's records regarding the number of suspensions for misconduct, and for student racial, gender, and disability category. Data were also categorized by school level; that is, elementary, middle, or secondary. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the results.

Results

Demographic Data

The results indicated that the student population is predominantly white, which is typical in eastern Kentucky. There are 3,019 (99.26%) white students in the school district; 1,541 males (52.69%) and 1,478 females (46.56%). There is 1 (.01%) male and 1 female (.01%) American Indian or Alaskan Native . There are 7 (.09%) and 5 (.06%) Asian or Pacific Islanders males and females, respectively. There are 5 (.06%) and 3 (.04%) Hispanic males and females, respectively. Also, there are 15 (.19%) and 21 (.27%) African-American males and females, respectively. Of the 3,019 students enrolled, 500 (14.36%) are categorized as disabled.

Students Suspended

Of the total of 465 students suspended for conduct problems, none were minorities. Three-hundred and eighty-five (82.8%) of the suspensions were given to white males and 80 (17.2%) were given to white females. Of the 465 students suspended, 92 (19.78%) were categorized as disabled.

The breakdown of suspensions by type of school indicates that three male students were suspended for misconduct in the elementary schools; two of which were categorized as disabled. In the middle school, 70 males, 15 of which were categorized as disabled, and 14 females were suspended. In the senior high school, 102 males, 25 of which were categorized as disabled, and 24 females, one of which was categorized as disabled, were suspended.

Discussion

More whites were suspended than is proportional for the school population due to no minorities having suspensions. Given the nature of the population in the school district, with an extremely small number of minorities, this result was not surprising. The data does support previous research that males were punished more than were females in the schools, given that 82.8% and 17.2% of the suspensions were given to males and females, respectively. This result, however, appears to be disproportionate when reviewing the percentages of males to females in the school district; 52.69% to 46.56%. Also of interest is the result that 19.78% of the suspensions were given to students categorized as disabled, when the disabled represent only 14.36% of the student population. All but one suspended disabled student was male.

As expected, the majority of suspensions for conduct violations occurred in the middle and high schools. In fact, suspensions occurred in the middle school whereas 126 suspensions occurred in the senior high school. Apparently, more students in the elementary grades adhere to the code of conduct in their respective schools than do students in the middle or high schools or alternatively, elementary student misconduct is not perceived to be as threatening to adult authority as is misconduct in older students such as those in middle school or high school. Since there are currently 741 and 904 students enrolled in the middle and high schools, respectively, the proportion of suspensions appears to be relatively equal between the schools. These findings appear to support the research indication that adolescents are more likely to get into trouble in school than are younger children (McFadden et al., 1992). These misconduct problems may be due to several factors such as peer influences, environmental influences, sex differences, and emotional and behavioral difficulties as a result of puberty (Fry & Gabriel, 1994: Sanson et al., 1993; Zoccolillo, 1993).

There are several implications from these results that are relevant to research and practice. In general, the results suggest that males develop more conduct problems than do females, as well as do adolescents, compared to younger children. Teachers and administrators should become aware of the research on school misbehavior as it relates to age, sex, race and disabling conditions so they can implement different behavioral intervention strategies. A factor which would appear to have the potential to exacerbate rates of student misconduct may be for example, lack of adult (teacher/administrator) experience and training in conflict resolution. Intervention strategies such as conflict resolution techniques and other behavioral shaping techniques are based on the philosophy that children should be in school where they can learn appropriate behaviors. Punishment, such as suspension, remove the students form learning environment and tells students what they should do. Punishment alone falls short of the rational goal in that it does not teach a student what is acceptable behavior (Harwig & Ruesch, 1994). Future research should be directed toward such efforts.

References

Adams, T. (1992). Public high schools: The uses of rehabilitative and punitive forms of discipline: A final report. Washington, D.C. Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Fry, P.,& Gabriel, H. (1994). Preface: The cultural construction of gender and aggression. Sex Roles, 30, 165-167.

Hart, S.N. (1987). Psychological maltreatment in the schools. School Psychology Review, 16, 169-178.

Hartwig, P., & Ruesch, M. (1994). Disciplining students with disabilities: A synthesis of critical and emerging issues. Alexandria VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

McFadden, A.C., Marsh, G.E., Price B.J., & Hwang, Y. (1992). A study of race and gender bias in the punishment of school children. Education and Treatment of Children, 15, 140-146.

McFadden, A.C., Marsh, G. E., Price, B.J., & Hwang, Y. (1994). A study of race and gender bias in the punishment of handicapped school children. The Urban Review, 24, 239-251.

Rose, T.L. (1988). Current disciplinary practices with handicapped students: Suspensions and expulsions. Exceptional Children, 55, 230-239.

Sanson, A., Prior, M., Smart, D., & Oberklaid, F. (1993). Gender differences in aggression in childhood: Implications for a peaceful world. Australian Psychologist, 28, 86-92.

Zoccolillo, M. (1993). Gender and development of conduct disorder. Development and Psychopathology, 5 (1-2), 65-78.